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## THE DIRECTION OF THE CHURCH'S EFFORT

THE Shorter Catechism gave us the great statement, "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him for ever".

One is tempted to comment upon the several virtues of this great saying, but I must confine myself to one—its balance. It admits by implication that there are also subordinate ends of man's life which are not identical with his chief end. There the writers of the Catechism show their balance, because there is an impulse in the religious nature which looks with dismay upon the fact that we are not wholly spiritual beings and regards attachment to anything but God as so much love taken from him. The *Imitation* of St. Thomas à Kempis is, I think, slightly marred in this respect—he is so afraid of the death and idolatry that wrong attachment to creaturely persons and things produces.

Refusal to accept the legitimacy of the subordinate ends of life is refusal to accept our Divinely ordained nature. God has made us men, not angels. To try to force upon ourselves the spirituality of angels must lead to sickness of soul, just as absorption in the creatures leads to its death.

The subordinate ends of life are God's Fatherly provision for His children. In themselves they are earthly things, but they redound to the glory of God through the thanksgiving of the creature—to adapt some words of St. Paul's (2 Cor. iv. 15)—and thus offer occasion by which the creature fulfils his chief end. One might add that the element of obedience in the use of the creatures also provides them with a religious aspect.

The point that I want to emphasise is that these subordinate ends occupy so much of our concern and busy-ness that they tend to absorb us to the exclusion of our chief end. Now that may be so obvious and trite a remark to you as to sound very dull. But there is, I think, evidence that this error has passed from the realm of conduct and is invading the Church's belief, and that is why, as a theologian, I feel it necessary to speak on these things.

But surely, you may say, the Church is not forgetting that man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever. That's what it stands for!

Let us then put the matter to the test and ask ourselves what the Church believes. Is the Church directing its life towards God, or towards earth and man? I believe it cannot face two ways, and that these are two ways.

## I

Man is a creaturely being. I trust we can agree upon that. What, then, does love of man mean to the Church? I should not be surprised to be told that the view is as common here as it is in the Old Country that to love God means to love man—that the way to love God is to love man.

I found myself discussing this matter with an old soldier in a Toc-H meeting not long ago. He said that he rarely or never went to church, for he was of the opinion that real Christianity meant helping your neighbour. He tried to do that, and thought that he succeeded pretty well. This, he said, was the essence of the matter. Now, if it be true that the way to love God is to love our fellow-man, I do not see any answer to this attitude. It is significant, is it not, that this claim to be fulfilling the essence of religion is accompanied by a complete absence of religious observances?

The Revised Church Hymnary of Scotland has most unfortunately been invaded by this heresy. A hymn of Whittier's contains the words:

To worship rightly is to love each other,  
Each smile a hymn, each kindly deed a prayer.

Such words appeal to human sentimentality, and subtly introduce falsity because they sound so nice. Yet is it not deeply repugnant that the worship of God in His holy majesty should be identified with smiling at a mere human creature or that a kindly deed can be thought to be good enough to take the place of prayer? For that, mark you, is what identifying the love of God with the love of man means. "To worship rightly is to love each other." This is real worship, it is intended to say. It is this that counts.

Now it is true that if we do not love our brother whom we have seen, we cannot love God whom we have not seen. It is true that:

He prayeth best who loveth best,  
All things both great and small,  
For the dear God who loveth us,  
He made and loveth all.

But this does not mean that, if we love the creatures, we have done all that is required. The Ancient Mariner found that having shot the albatross, he could not pray when he had desperate need of prayer. We cannot love God without loving His creatures. But it is the love of God which is important and the greater part of the sadness of failure in human love is that it deprives us of Divine love.

In a way it seems to me that we have learned so well the lesson—not the practice, but the moral truth—of love towards our neighbour, that the second commandment has taken the place of the First and Great One. For there can be no doubt whatsoever that to our Lord loving God and loving man were not one and the same thing, nor equal things. He, before all, has made the love of man necessary (not central!), but he could not commit the blasphemy—for blasphemy it is—of making them one and the same. He laid down the love of God as the First and Great Commandment: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” These are two commandments, not one. The second is second, not first, and the second is not called great. Fulfilment of the second does not meet the requirement of the first. To believe it does is to break the first.

One reason why many find difficulty in this matter may be, as someone suggested to me, that God is unseen, vague, not very much a living Person to them. They want to know what loving God means in practice and they believe or are told that in practice loving God means loving people. But this terrible word “practice”, and its adjective “practical”—how much genuine religion has been twisted into pure secularism by being bludgeoned with them! One would not object to practical life being made the test of all things if practical living were not so much identified with an earthbound outlook. When you hear people talking about practical living you will often find that they are referring to a kind of life that omits all religious practices. What has happened to Christianity if the practice of prayer is no longer worthy of being called practical—or worship, or Bible reading? Does nothing happen in these occupations? Or are they not rather the very essence of the *practice* of the presence of God, and how can God ever be a living

Being to us if we ignore precisely those religious *practices* through which alone He comes to us personally? It is not surprising that the view that love to God means loving man is accompanied by neglect of Church ordinances, for to proclaim that view is to drive men out of church by telling them that their proper worship of God is outside the church, not inside it. "To worship rightly is to love each other." No, No, No. Does God not exist? Is He not much more alive than any other being—the great God, Infinite, eternal, unchangeable, who in holy love in Christ loved me and gave Himself for me? Is not the worship and love of Him, the great Source and Goal of my life, to be the chief practice of my life? "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind." St. Luke adds "and with all thy strength". This is the first and great commandment. The second is not first, nor is it great by comparison, although it may by no means be broken.

Let me remind you that the love of man that does not come out of another different love, love of God, is usually a poor thing. When my Toc-H friend spoke about doing the right thing by one's neighbour he probably had in mind those pleasant little good turns by which we help lame dogs over stiles. One may be pardoned for expressing a doubt whether this kind of love is very costing. Does it go on sacrificing itself when the persons helped are thankless? Does it accept the pain of helping those who are "not worth helping"? The love of Christ is a love that serves the unlovely, and it requires the patience and suffering of the Cross. I think one may claim without much fear of contradiction that this kind of love of man is not found except among those who have first of all a very deep love of God in their hearts. It was only his love to God that made General Booth say to his Army, "Go for men, and go for the worst"! The love of God constrained him.

Do I seem to be justifying love towards God because it alone produces love towards man? I mean to do the reverse. It is the love of man that requires justification, and nothing can justify it but Divine Love. The love that the Christian has for his fellow is a love, inspired in him by God, for another whom God loves, and the aim of the Christian's love is to enable the other to fulfil his chief end in loving God. This is the unique service that the Church can do for man—bring him to God. She dare not speak to him of anything less than this.

What does the love of God mean in practice? Above all, it means worship, together and alone; it means prayer; it means waiting upon God's revelation of Himself in Scripture—Bible-reading. These things make up the essence of practical religion, or the practice of religion.

## II

What is our belief about services of worship? May I mention a matter in which, along with others in the pulpit, I believe I have erred? It is common in one's prayers in the pulpit or in a service to speak as if the aim of a service is to fit us for "practical life" (to use this question-begging term again). There is no need for me to harp on the well-worn theme that a religion is vain that does not show itself in daily life. Religion is not a Sunday-go-to-meeting affair, but belongs to the whole week. We all know that truth so well—in theory—that it would be wearisome and presumptuous in me to labour it. I believe we know it too well, and that instead of subordinating every day to the spirit of Sunday we have subordinated Sunday to every day, and incidentally have well-nigh lost it. To speak as if services of worship have their primary aim in strengthening us for life's tasks is to put the secondary before the primary. That is not the great reason why Christian people come to church. They come because they love God and desire to worship him in the family of God. Worship needs no other justification than that. This is the great end that it serves, for this is the great end of our whole being, and the great end of the Church's existence. "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him for ever."

So I would propose a reversal of our speech, in the interest of Christian truth, in the interests of the life of the Church and of the soul: that we worship together on Sunday not in order that we might live better on Monday, and so on, but that we live as Christianly as we can through the week, so that when we present ourselves together before God on Sundays we might make Him as full and unblemished an offering as can be. It is nonsense to say that every day should be like Sunday, for there is a spirit of worship abroad on Sunday that lifts it above every day. Then the Church Universal in especial leads men in worship before the throne of God, and earth becomes most like heaven, where angels and archangels continually cry, "Holy,

holy, holy, Lord God Almighty". Other days cannot be like Sunday. It has a holiness that other days cannot have, and are not meant to have, short of heaven. Not that worship must be confined to Sunday, but by the Church's provenance men are set free for it on this day as on no other day, and find and fulfil in worship, so far as they find grace, their chief end, the glory and enjoyment of God, the very goal of their beings. Far from what is done in church being subordinate to the other hours of man's life, the reverse is the case. Here and here alone, he is fulfilling the supreme end of his being. He does not look from here to his real life without, but all his life without must be drawn into the supreme moment at the feet of God with his fellows. In other words, the supreme end of practical life is worship, not vice versa. Our empty churches are in part a harvest of our own sowing, for we have been saying other things to the people.

### III

How is the Church oriented towards the New Order?

This expression catches the ear of every preacher, because he has been preaching about it for a long time.

The significant thing about the idea of a New Order is that it reveals where the great hopes of men to-day lie. Many Christians consider that the principal task of the Church is to devote herself to bringing in a better social order. Or else good men preach without being fully aware that the underlying assumption of what they say is that this is the true direction of the Church's effort.

Now I believe that the Church must be active in these matters, and I trust that nothing that I have said or shall say will be so misunderstood as to make it appear that the Church does not have a very urgent duty in all social affairs. But there is a point to be remarked upon that is significant of misdirection of effort.

The word *hope* is the significant word.

The hopes of the Christian are not pinned to the idea of a better world round the corner, and that is why it distorts the faith to speak as if the Church's main task is to work for this better order—as if the kingdom of God is waiting to be established on earth by political action.

This idea is a distortion for two reasons:

(1) The Christian knows that the kingdom of God has already been established in the world through Christ Jesus. This kingdom is not an ideology, nor an idea in men's minds, nor an ideal up in the air. It has already come. I am speaking as literally as one can speak. There are millions on this earth to-day to whom Christ is their only King. I don't know how many hundreds of thousands of Christians there are—but they are a host innumerable—who would accept death rather than deny our only King and Head. Napoleon—no believer—was fascinated by Christ and used to wonder how Christ succeeded where he failed. The Kingdom of God has been in the world for a long time and His word has proved true that the gates of hell would not prevail against it. We, the Church of Christ, are already in the Kingdom. As Moffatt translates St. Paul, "We are a colony of Heaven". "My kingdom is not of this world", by which our Lord meant that it does not originate here. But it is here! Heaven has come to earth in the Church, in her worship, her sacraments, her life in Christ. Here and here alone, the chief end of man is already being fulfilled, where we glorify God and enjoy Him after an eternal fashion, here where we eat the bread of life and drink the wine of Heaven. St. Paul puts it again (Eph. ii. 6): "God . . . hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." That means in Heaven. Or again, God has "blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Heaven in Christ". The redeemed people, the Church of Christ, are already in His Kingdom, finding the fulfilment of the chief end of their being in the glory and love of God. The Christian then does not look for the Kingdom of God just round the corner. That is not where his hopes are. For Christ has put the Kingdom already into his hands. His hopes are already being fulfilled. God forbid that we should speak to our people as if their hopes can be fulfilled only in some uncertain political arrangement, whether near or far.

We must hope that great things will be done after the war. As Christians with the duties of citizens we must work hard for them. But no man's Christian hopes can be fulfilled in any political arrangement—not while his chief end is to love and enjoy God. The Church's task is to establish first of all and be always establishing an order where God is worshipped.

To try to get men and women to listen to religion on the grounds that it alone can build up a happy social order is to base



our appeal on a truth—a dangerous truth. For that appeal sows the seed of the belief that a happy social order is the supreme end of life. It puts man first, and makes religion—God and Divine things—his servant. That the social order does not contain its supreme end in itself is a truth that badly needs saying to-day. Human society is meant to be founded on and to issue in the community of God, in the communion of His saints loving and worshipping God. The crown of the social order is God. The fulfilment of the social order is its fulfilment in the Church at worship.

(2) The second distortion in the earth-bound idea of a new order is that it stirs hopes of a state of perfection that can never be realised on this earth in this age. "If in this life only", said St. Paul, "we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable."

Why is it that the idea of Heaven plays so small a part in the consciousness of the ordinary man to-day? People say that nothing could appeal to them less than the idea of sitting on a cloud, wearing a golden crown, and playing a harp for all time. They say they want their heaven now, on this earth, and they become just ordinary good-timers, with frankly no use for religion, or else, if there is a little more in them than that, they say they want the Church to be more "practical" and set about making this world a better place.

Two different views present themselves. There are those who believe that the Kingdom of God can be brought into being in this world by the labour of men and women of good-will—a view that has close affiliations with the doctrines of emergent evolution. Such a view can have a strongly Godward aspect. The other view is that of those who believe that the roots of evil in life are so deep that no perfection can be looked for on earth in this age. It does not say that wars or social crimes cannot be prevented. On the contrary, these are made by man and can be prevented by man. Yet the roots of evil go so deep that the human world will never in this age cease to be menaced by it. In a world where sin could only be vanquished by the death of God's Eternal Son—where only Deity could break its power—no merely human schemes can inaugurate perfection. The Kingdom of God is a Kingdom which has both come and is to come, but its coming again will be by the act of God alone, in the perfect day of Jesus Christ. So the Church is a Church

that lives in the Kingdom which has already come, but is also yet to come, enjoying the power of its victory, fed by Word and Sacrament, having the earnest of the Spirit, and abounding in hope, because its present life has also promise of the life to come.

This is where the New Testament hope truly resides, in the final act of God's redemption. I confess to feeling that to feed the people with hopes of a perfect society on earth produced by human action is to feed them on delusions. The tragedies of recent years should teach us better. The Perfect Society will come only by the Revelation of the Lord from Heaven.

#### IV

When people say that they want their Heaven now, it is a sign that they want pleasures but do not want God. They no longer believe in man's chief end. When they pour fun upon harps and golden crowns it is only that they do not understand what these things stand for. It is rather strange that sometimes even intelligent people do not realise that harps and crowns are symbolic. The harps are a sign of joy, the crowns of victory. Surely the only person who must remain blind to the meaning of the harp symbol must be the person who has never had enough happiness to want to sing. And the crown, of course, stands for victory, for reigning over something that before had been our mortal enemy—in this case, death and sin.

Now the soul that believes that man's chief end is to glorify God, to love Him with heart and soul and strength and mind, knows what all this stands for. As the hymn says:

They who fain would serve Thee best,  
Are conscious most of wrong within.

The man who has despaired of himself, who has found the glory of the Divine pardoning love, but who yet even in the secret places of the heart, finds the roots of sin working, knows what the blessedness of the final hope is, for he knows that his nature awaits a transformation that he cannot himself work. Heaven is very real to the Christian and very desirable in his best moments, for it means at last the perfect fulfilment in holy love of this the chief end of life.

On the other hand, the man who knows the subtlety of the motions of sin in the depths of his soul cannot hold an easy view of the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth by human

effort. Redemption in the end, he knows, means a transformation by the intervention of God. He is saved by hope. The harp and the crown are the symbols of his hope's fulfilment.

The failure of belief in Heaven goes along with failure to believe in the importance of the First and Great Commandment, failure to believe that our new life is in God. What has happened to the Church if it has ceased preparing men and women for Heaven?

It seems to me that belief in the Second Coming, of some great act of the final consummation of redemption, is cardinal in the Christian faith. But it is necessary to hold one's balance. I doubt, for example, whether too much emphasis upon the idea of its *immediacy* makes for wholeness in the Christian life. The Christian who devotes himself to his clear tasks now is the one who will be found ready at the Lord's coming. "Blessed is that servant whom his Lord when He cometh shall find so doing" (Luke xii. 43).

To some it may seem that rejection of the belief that the Kingdom of God can be brought about on earth by human effort leads to pessimism. What, then, it may be asked, is the use of trying?

No Christian man can ever be a pessimist. Knowing Christ's victory in his own life, he cannot possibly put any limits to the extent of those victories. But he knows the deceitfulness of sin and that he can mistake the Devil himself for an angel of light. He knows that human life as it now is will never be free of the menace of evil. So he accepts life as a perpetual warfare of the Spirit, and looks for no continuing city on earth, confessing himself with the Church as a stranger and pilgrim, seeking a city which is to come.

As we see things, the Church and the Church alone has something everlasting to say to the world, fitted precisely to its condition, offering men hope in this life *and* in the life to come. But it will matter gravely how the Church presents her truth to men. On one side, if we direct her effort to the service of men in a humanistic ideal, we shall accelerate the secularisation of the world and achieve nothing to ameliorate its sorrows.

But if the Church directs its effort towards summoning men to their true destiny in their life in God, one dare put no limits to what may be achieved in the power of God. Then the Church will truly serve men, by serving God.

What would be sad beyond words would be for the Church, having entrusted to her the one pearl of great price, the secret of the life with God and for God, to barter it, in eagerness to do business with men in the competing markets of their desires, for some humanistic ideal that will save no man's soul and cost her her own. We are not a business organisation determined to keep our doors open by any means. We desire to gain members, we desire to gain the world. But what shall it profit the Church if she gain the whole world and lose her own soul? Our salvation is to hold grip of the truth that the only final goal for man, immediate and prospective, now and hereafter, is the glory and the joy of God in the communion of the saints.

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